

**DAVIE AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD**  
**DECEMBER 10, 2012**

**1. ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. Board members present were: Chair Dave Parrish, Vice Chair Scott Weinstein, Julie Aitken, and Sam Scott. Board Secretary Janet Gale was also present. Jason Hurley was absent.

**2. PRESENTATION**

**2.1 Non-Organic Fertilizers by Bayardo Herrera of Agrium Advanced Technologies**

Chair Parrish explained that Mr. Herrera was unable to attend due to a conflict. He advised that he had invited Mr. Herrera to give his presentation at the next scheduled meeting.

Chair Parrish added that Mr. Herrera had provided the Board with literature on non-organic fertilizers. He recalled that the discussion of these fertilizers had arisen because one provision of the community garden at Robbins Lodge had stated that the program would use organic fertilizers only. Chair Parrish stated that non-organic fertilizers could also be used safely on both trees and vegetable plants; in addition, synthetic products break down more quickly, as there was no time-release element to their coating.

Ms. Aitken suggested that the Board compile a list of appropriate organic and non-organic fertilizers for the community garden. Chair Parrish said this could be accomplished with Mr. Herrera's assistance.

**3. OLD BUSINESS**

**3.1 Status of Van Kirk Property Tax Exemption for 2012**

Dr. Scott reported that the farmers using the Van Kirk property have been instructed to vacate the premises thus far; however, Dr. Scott explained that he had met with the Mayor to discuss the possibility of the Town entering into new agreements with individual farmers. He concluded that the basic decision to vacate the property under the old agreement was still in effect. He had not received any further communication from Intergovernmental Affairs Manager Phillip Holste.

Dr. Scott stated that he would like to highlight some of the positive aspects of urban agriculture as recognized in the Batten's Farm experiment. These included the provision of soil and equipment by Vice Chair Weinstein to build up the level of soil on nearly an acre of this property. This acre now grows strawberries, tomatoes, kale, mustard, radishes, beets, lettuce, and spinach.

Dr. Scott continued that the first two acres of the property would be cleaned up and built up with the addition of soil. The five to six acres at the back of the property have not yet been touched. A building pad in this area will be used for parking. The main building on the property, and the petting zoo, were up and running. He concluded that a small Asian tea garden was planned as well, featuring benches and waterfalls.

Dr. Scott advised that the only contractual item yet to be addressed was the commercial kitchen. There had originally been consideration of using some of the old equipment from a golf course; however, this equipment was no longer available. All other projects proposed for the Batten's Farm property have been achieved and surpassed.

He continued that the Farmers' Market did not appear able to generate sufficient capital to cover its costs. They were hoping to recover current expenditures. Dr. Scott asserted that many of the farmers supplying produce to this market want to charge the market more than they might charge a local store. This has resulted in some administrative headaches and frustrations.

Vice Chair Weinstein asked why there might be so much negative pressure from the Town for the program to conform to the letter of the Request for Proposal (RFP). Dr. Scott replied that there may be some ignorance of the project, as some individuals at the Town level have not taken the time to visit Batten's Farm and become better-informed. He pointed out that a business proposal was a separate entity from a lease agreement, although this distinction was not always recognized at the Town's administrative level. He concluded that he had asked the Town Council to visit the property in the company of the Agricultural Advisory Board, so that the Council could be shown what had been accomplished on the property, including what had been accomplished above and beyond the original proposal.

Vice Chair Weinstein stated that he felt Batten's Farm Farmers' Market had come a long way, and he was very happy with what he saw there. He recalled that the Board was involved in developing the original RFP, and suggested that they might recommend Town Staff place less pressure on the North-South Institute (Institute) and "cut them some slack."

Chair Parrish agreed, citing the example of a Code violation related to flags on the property, which he did not feel was appropriate. He asserted that agriculture was exempt from this Code provision, as long as the signage did not advertise anything else. Ms. Aitken agreed, noting that Code did not apply if a sign was advertising agriculture, produce, or services. Dr. Scott stated that this Code violation was an example of the response he had described from the Town's administration.

Vice Chair Weinstein asserted that the specific details of the Batten's Farm project were outlined in the RFP. Although some of its goals and requirements were ambitious, he felt the Institute had done a good job in meeting these goals. He asked the Board how they might arrive at a recommendation that would allow the project to continue in a positive fashion.

Dr. Scott stated that the Institute's use of the property had complied with more than 90% of the requirements included in its six-year agreement; in addition, in order to satisfy the Town's requirements, he had spent more money than originally proposed in developing the project.

Ms. Aitken asked if the Town appeared to be trying to "regulate [the project] to death." Dr. Scott said this was an accurate characterization. Vice Chair Weinstein added that Town administrators were doing their jobs strictly to the letter of the agreement; however, Dr. Scott asserted that the administrators have misconstrued the agreement and wish to recreate it without acknowledging that the agreement was separate from the proposal.

Vice Chair Weinstein asked if Dr. Scott was opposed to a new agreement. Dr. Scott replied that he would not sign a new agreement, but would be willing to sign an amendment to the proposal. He was not aware of what changes the Town might wish to include in an amended draft.

Vice Chair Weinstein suggested that the Institute might wish to draft its own amended proposal. Dr. Scott stated that if a new document is to be drafted, the Institute has shown sufficient documentation of what they have accomplished with the project, what can be done, and how they plan to proceed. If the Town did not wish to go forward with the existing six-year agreement, they may elect to dissolve the partnership.

Ms. Aitken asked if Dr. Scott had spoken with the Mayor with regard to the agreement. He replied that he had met with both the Mayor and the Town administration; however, he said it is difficult to discuss the project with individuals who have not visited the property or attempted to understand the nature of the project.

Ms. Aitken asked if there were any specific requirements that the Town felt the Institute has not achieved. Dr. Scott said the community kitchen has not been developed thus far; the "you pick" program and the Asian tea garden were being developed within less than two years of the original agreement. He felt it was untrue to suggest that there had been any breach of contract, reiterating that the proposal and the agreement were separate documents.

Vice Chair Weinstein agreed that the use of terms such as "breach of contract" by Town Staff was not appropriate with regard to what had been accomplished by the Batten's Farm project and Farmers' Market. He suggested that the Board could take on a more active role with regard to the ongoing discussions between the North-South Institute and the Town.

Ms. Aitken observed that any contract may be subject to further negotiation, as not everything can be anticipated at the beginning of a working relationship. She pointed out that this would be preferable to shutting down operations. Dr. Scott agreed, recalling that the Institute had been asked to show "before and after" documentation of the work they had done on the property; however, this documentation was not shown at the recent Town Council meeting. He felt this meant the Town was not willing to show the full argument in favor of the project.

Ms. Aitken proposed that the Institute provide the Town Council Members directly with a copy of the before and after photos. Dr. Scott said he would circulate the presentation more widely, and would encourage and facilitate field visits to Batten's Farm by the Council Members and Town Staff.

Ms. Aitken recommended that this issue be discussed further at the Board's January 2013 meeting. The members agreed to re-title this agenda item as "Progress of Pending Amendments to the [Batten's Farm] Proposal."

Regarding the Van Kirk property, Ms. Aitken said while it would be acceptable for the Town to allow the property to remain unused on and after January 1, 2013, it would not be acceptable for them to allow the property to revert to a wilderness-like state after a great deal of work has been done to clear and maintain it for agricultural use. She concluded that the Town may decide that it was more beneficial for the North-South Institute to continue a presence on this property. Dr. Scott said he would email the Town close to the end of the year to determine if the Town was interested in this possibility.

Vice Chair Weinstein asked if the Board should make a recommendation to the Town with regard to continued use of the property. Ms. Aitken agreed that this may be helpful. She added that the Van Kirk property would need to be maintained at the Town's expense if there was no one using the property. Ms. Aitken suggested that the recommendation be sent to Mr. Holste and copied to the Town Council.

Vice Chair Weinstein advised that it may be time-consuming for the Town to arrive at a decision regarding the status of the property, as there would be more than one person involved in the decision-making process. Chair Parrish pointed out that the January 1st date was an arbitrary date used for tax purposes; it was less useful when applied to the planting of crops, as only limited crops may be grown in the winter.

**3.2 Follow up on Progress for Re-establishing Contact with Residents who were Interested in the Robbins Park Pilot Program**

Vice Chair Weinstein advised that he had received an email from Parks and Recreation Operations Manager Matt Mlodzinski, who was seeking a copy of the original list of interested residents. He said he had been unable to find a copy of the list, and recalled that he had provided Town Staff with the original copy some time ago. It was decided that if the original list cannot be found, a public service announcement would be issued once again so interested residents may respond. Dr. Scott said he may have a partial list, which he would send to Vice Chair Weinstein.

Vice Chair Weinstein pointed out that the Town personnel currently working on the community garden project were not present when the idea was first presented to residents. He suggested that the Board members might be able to generate more public interest in the program.

Vice Chair Weinstein recalled that the Farm Park had once been discussed as a potential site, but had ultimately been dismissed as there was no approved ingress or egress to the site. The result was that the Community Garden Subcommittee has taken no further action since this time; the only program currently being discussed was the Robbins Park pilot program. He recalled that there had been offers of corporate donations in order to stimulate activity at the Farm Park; however, the bureaucracy involved in allowing people to pursue urban farming had proved to be more complicated than initially expected.

It was agreed that additional follow-up on the Robbins Park item would appear on the January Agenda as well.

**3.3 Update the Davie Farmers' Guide**

Ms. Aitken said she had not been able to work on this update thus far. Dr. Scott offered to assist in its development. It was noted that State statutes regarding composting and other related issues would be consulted, as this information did not appear in the original document. She advised that work on the Guide would not be complete by the date of the January board meeting.

**4. NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business discussed.

**5. ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA**

It was noted that the next Board meeting was scheduled for January 7, 2013. Follow-up will continue on the status of the Van Kirk property, re-establishment of contact with residents for the Robbins Park pilot community garden program, and the update to the Davie Farmers' Guide.

**6. COMMENTS AND / OR SUGGESTIONS**


There were no comments and/or suggestions made.

**7. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business and no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Date Approved:

January 7, 2012

  
Chair/Board Member